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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that policy change can best be understood as the product of competition among advocacy coalitions within the constraints of a policy subsystem (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). This paper presents findings of a study that examined the rhetoric of policy change in Texas utilizing the voucher and charter-schools movements as an illustrative case study. Data sources included newspapers, journals, official documents, congressional testimony, and transcripts. The paper concludes that the battle over vouchers and charter schools in Texas may be viewed as a series of political maneuvers over the creation of meaning: the construction of beliefs about events, policies, leaders, problems, and crises that rationalize or challenge existing inequalities. Charter-school legislation in 1995 was successful because the rhetorical scope of the conflict was narrow. The major political advantage of charter schools is that they occupy something of a middle ground between the public education system as it is currently structured on the one hand and a voucher system on the other hand (Sauter 1993). Because charter schools stay within the realm of the public sphere, charter schools were more politically palatable to a legislature committed to educational reform. However, the scope of the conflict over vouchers was much larger and thus less easily controlled by any single group. The broader scope encompassed such issues as inclusion/exclusion and conflict between the public and private spheres. Issues of class, ethnicity, and inequality which were largely excluded from the dialogue on charter schools could not be excluded from the dialogue on school vouchers. (Contains 103 references). (LMI)

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What's to Negotiate? Interaction in the Absence of Dialogue

The Battle Over Vouchers and Charter Schools

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The purpose of this study is to examine the rhetoric of policy change in Texas utilizing the voucher and charter schools movements as an illustrative case study.[1] Research suggests that policy change can best be understood as the product of competition among advocacy coalitions within the constraints of a policy subsystem (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). These advocacy coalitions are "composed of bureaucrats, legislative personnel, interest group leaders, researchers, and specialist reporters" (Sabatier, 1991, p. 148).

Since policy change is the product of the interaction of various advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1988), then analysis of the rhetoric used by policy actors in their negotiations can illustrate how (or how not) issues of race, class, and cultural dialogue become incorporated into the policy dialogue of educational reform. This study is significant because by critically examining the rhetoric of policy debates and the interactions of policymakers, it will bring to light the absence of any meaningful consideration of the discourses of race, class, and cultural dialogue within the policy debates which shape educational change. I argue that the debate over vouchers and charter schools in Texas occurs largely in the absence of any significant dialogue incorporating these cultural and contextual voices. Further, I argue that the language used in debates over vouchers and charter schools shapes the

[1]The state legislature authorized the creation of charter schools during the 1995 legislative session (Senate Bill 1). Repeated attempts during the last three legislative sessions to introduce voucher plans have failed, although another attempt will be made in the 1999 legislative session.

scope of conflict in these debates, thereby making one outcome (charter schools) more likely and the other (vouchers) less so.

Rationale

Of recent state-level educational reforms, none generate as much conflict or hortatory political rhetoric (Edelman, 1964) as proposals calling for school choice.[2] In Texas, this has led to calls for vouchers and charter schools. Legislative proposals for vouchers and charter schools have been introduced in each of the last three legislative sessions. The debate over these reforms raises serious questions of inclusion and exclusion, particularly insofar as they threaten to transfer funding from a public school system in a state which historically underfunds its public schools. Since the purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which issues of race, class, and culture are incorporated (or not) into the dialogue of educational reform, then analysis of the voucher and charter schools movements is the ideal case study through which to analyze the rhetoric used by policy actors because, as McNeil (1988) observes, "Texans little bother to disguise or moderate the political and economic rationales behind their public policies" (p. 200). As a result, "what may remain hidden in linking educational policy to the economic and political power structures in other states is more fully visible in Texas" (p. 200).

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[2]For the purpose of this study, school choice is defined as programs that allow parents to choose the schools their students attend. This includes charter schools, which operate autonomously by contractual arrangement with a school district; vouchers, which are redeemable at either public or private schools; and open enrollment plans, which permit students in public schools to attend schools outside the attendance zone of their school or district.

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Summary of Relevant Literature

The Politics of Language

It is commonly accepted that language is not and can never be politically neutral. Edelman (1988) observes that "language is the key creator of the social worlds people experience, not a tool for describing an objective reality" (p. 103). Given the non-objectivity of language, "virtually every word and phrase used in casual speech and thought bears a heavy connotative burden which opens the way to socially approved conclusions and inhibits the recognition of possibilities that are not culturally condoned" (Edelman, 1964, pp. 119-120). Language, particularly metaphors and analogies, "are used to control people's evaluations of policy alternatives" (Stone, 1988, p. 200).

It is in this sense that language is not politically neutral. It structures decisionmaking insofar as it can favor one result and diminish the consideration or adoption of alternatives (Riker, 1986). How is this favored result achieved? Language is employed to either expand or narrow the scope of conflict since "every change in the scope of conflict has a bias; it is partisan in its nature" (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 4). This bias manifests itself in the "exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others" (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 69). Edelman (1988) argues that

> the critical element in political maneuver for advantage is the creation of meaning: the construction of beliefs about events, policies, leaders, problems, and crises that rationalize or challenge existing inequalities. The strategic need is to immobilize opposition and mobilize support.

> While coercion and intimidation help to check resistance in all political systems, the key tactic must always be the evocation of interpretations that legitimize favored courses of action and threaten or reassure people so as to encourage them to be supportive or to remain quiescent. (pp. 103-104)

The choice of words used, and the care in which they are crafted into policy arguments, opens windows of opportunity for some actors or groups, while closing off others from discourse. Policy discourse refers "to the interactions of individuals, interest groups, social movements, and institutions through which problematic situations are converted to policy problems, agendas are set, decisions are made, and actions are taken" (Rein and Schon, 1993, p. 145). Schattschneider (1960) observed that "a conclusive way of checking the rise of conflict is simply to provide no arena for it" (p. 69).

Meaning, then, becomes in part a function of the context within which debate occurs. It is dependent upon the way in which issues are framed in political discourse. Framing "is a way of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analyzing, persuading, and acting" (Rein and Schon, 1993, p. 146). According to Rein and Schon, the process of framing

> always takes place within a nested context. Policy issues tend to arise in connection with governmental programs, which exist in some policy environment, which is part of some broader political and economic setting, which is located, in turn, within a historical era. (p. 154)

Meaning, then, cannot be inferred apart from context. Language is not self-referential. To use Jackendoff's (1995) observation, language "is *all* construction" (p. 164). Language constructs the people who use it (Foucault, 1976). It is therefore reasonable to conclude, as Edelman (1988) does, that

> language about politics is a clue to the speaker's view of reality at the time, just as an audience's interpretation of the same language is a clue to what may be a different reality for them. If there are no conflicts over meaning, the issue is not political, by definition. (p. 104)

All too often, the semantic role of a contextual situation is overlooked in policy analyses. Rein and Schon (1993) observe that "even a chat between close friends occurs in the 'institutional' setting of someone's house or a walk around the park" (p. 156). Therefore, the institutional context carries "its own characteristic perspectives and ways of framing issues, or it may offer particular roles, channels, and norms for discussion and debate" (Rein and Schon, 1993, p. 156).

Often, this context remains unperceived or is unquestioned by political actors. In their analysis of discourse in the mass media and the political arena, Bartolome and Macedo (1997) reveal the extent to which racism and division has infiltrated mainstream political discourse. The researchers assert that we "rarely question the role of the dominant language in the devaluation of the cultural and ethnic groups under study...we understand little how the English language can subordinate and alienate" members of nondominant groups (p. 233).

It is within this conceptual lens that the role of ideology can be critically deconstructed. Ideology involves the "production of sense and meaning" (McLaren, 1989, p. 177). Hegemonic ideologies may be defined as belief systems which "shape culture and the subjective experience of meaning in a fashion that allows for a shared worldview subscribed to by *both* dominant and subordinate groups (Miron, 1992, p. 267). To attain this degree of linguistic permeation and domination, "hegemonic forces must compromise with other potentially dominant social groups as well as subordinate groups in order to be perceived as moving beyond narrow, corporate interests to embody universal (public) interests" (Miron, 1992, p. 268).

This is not to say that language is utilized in every instance to attain hegemonic domination. However, as Delpit (1995) observes, power manifests itself in the acceptance of the worldviews of the privileged as the only reality of consequence; the worldviews of others are dismissed as inconsequential. For example, Rochefort and Cobb (1994) argue that national ideologies such as free-market capitalism and minimal government intervention are so potent that alternatives are considered radical. By utilizing language to structure dialogue, it becomes possible to "construct a world in which class, race, sex, and other inequalities are not paramount" (Edelman, 1988, p. 114). It is for this reason that political discourse must be critically deconstructed and analyzed to determine the extent to which issues of race, class, and culture are included or marginalized in policy debate.

The Political Manipulation of Language

By problematizing political discourse and the context within which it takes place, we may better understand how discourse serves to include favored voices and policies while excluding others. For example, Tyack (1974) and Hansot and Tyack (1982) have documented the success political progressives of the early twentieth century had in removing public control from educational decisionmaking and placing the process in the hands of "experts". By defining spheres of activity and policy as beyond the political realm, or as nonpartisan, professionals were able to insulate key areas of educational decision making from popular pressures (Katznelson and Weir, 1985). Similarly, by contracting the sphere in which lay people could participate, school professionals were able to implement their policy solutions largely without opposition (Katznelson and Weir, 1985). This was made possible through the political manipulation of language. By redefining partisanship as a form of deviancy, partisanship was sanitized out of the political discourse, leaving nonpartisanship or expert control as the preferred solution. By manipulating language in this manner, school professionals were able to exclude the voices of the public from the policy dialogue.

Today, several new actors have come to dominate the conversation on educational reform. Included in this group are numerous business coalitions (Cuban, 1992; McGuire, 1990), state governors (James, 1991; Mazzoni, 1993; Weaver and Geske, 1996), media (Feir, 1995), and individual policy entrepreneurs (Mazzoni, 1993). As these new players formed policy

networks, they were able to shape the educational reform agenda. As a result, few policy initiatives were advanced without the support of these networks, particularly those composed of members of the business community (Borman, Castenell, and Gallagher, 1993; Kaplan and Usdan, 1992). Hundreds of reports were issued (more than 300 had appeared by 1990), most expressing the corporate view of much-needed educational reforms (Cuban, 1992).

It is the language utilized in these reports that is instructive. Most reports are framed within the context of changing national and international economic conditions, particularly perceived declines in worker productivity, declining economic competitiveness, declining standards and academic achievement, the view of students as consumers, and the linking of education to economic growth (Berliner and Biddle, 1995; Cuban, 1992; Finn, 1991; Mazzoni, 1993; McGuire, 1990).

The ascension of what I call neocorporatist policy actors has altered the political context of state education policymaking. Weaver and Geske (1996) note that the traditional state educational establishment, including the "chief state school officer, state education agency officials, and major education interest group leaders" play a far less dominant role in shaping state education policy today (p. 1). The opposition of traditional education interest groups to many of the neocorporatist educational reforms has been neutralized (Feir, 1995), their positions in the debate marginalized, and their voices ignored. This led Kaplan and Usdan (1992) to conclude that we are being conditioned by these networks to accept a reform agenda featuring readiness

for school and work, testing, standards, the push for international competitiveness, and *school choice* (italics mine). These policy networks serve to define and limit the parameters within which discourse on education reform occurs. Unfortunately, by amplifying the voices of neocorporatist political actors, and drowning out the voices of others, many educational reforms fail to address problems of racial and economic isolation and the related underlying circumstances that lead to failure for many students (Maeroff, 1988; Orfield, 1994).

The Intersection of Language & Culture

Cultural and historical forces shape the context within which policy change occurs. As Fuhrman (1989) observed in her analysis of reform and implementation in six states, the context within which problems are framed and solutions offered matters, particularly insofar as it serves to illuminate the underlying forces--the "grid of social regularities" (Scheurich, 1994, p. 313)--that shape the scope and nature of policy change. A major component of this grid is a product of the intersection of language and culture. Elkins and Simeon (1979) define political culture as

> a short-hand expression for a 'mind set' which has the effect of limiting attention to less than the full range of alternative behaviors, problems, and solutions which are logically possible. Since it represents a 'disposition' in favor of a range of alternatives, by corollary another range of alternatives receives little or no attention within a particular culture. (p. 128)

James (1991) observes that "varying political cultures are significant in structuring attention to educational issues at the state level" (p. 195). According to Elkins and Simeon (1979), "most people in any culture...will take for granted a particular course of action or consider only a few alternatives" (p. 128). Wirt, Mitchell, and Marshall (1988) use differences in state political culture to explain differences in policy behavior among states.

Culture plays a significant role in shaping how problems are defined and solutions proffered (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994). Bosso (1994) argues that "the 'received culture' seems to have had a greater role in defining the range of legitimate alternatives than any policy elite or interest group" (p. 199). Political culture "defines the range of acceptable possible alternatives from which groups or individuals may, other circumstances permitting, choose a course of action" (Elkins and Simeon, 1979, p. 131).

Policy change is difficult when it conflicts with strongly held public values in the political culture (Bosso, 1994). Ultimately, as Ellis (1993) observes, political conflict "has been and continues to be animated by fundamentally different visions of the good life" (p. 151). For example, states which have a reformist or progressive tradition in their political culture tend to be leaders in policy innovation (Mazzoni, 1993). Mawhinney (1993) found that "the Ontario educational policy community is tightly knit with well defined sets of assumptions and norms" (p. 412). In such cases, the dialogue is structured or framed within a particular cultural context. This becomes incorporated through formal and informal processes into the policy system

(Mazzoni, 1993). It is through institutions that political culture exerts its effect on policy change.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This is a case study of the rhetoric used in political debates (primarily in committee hearings) over the creation of voucher and charter school legislation in Texas. The case study method was employed because it provides "for a more complete understanding of a situation's complexity" (Majchrzak, 1984, p. 63). This approach "engenders an extensive dialogue between the investigator's ideas and the data" (Ragin, 1987, p. 49). Thus, the research design has an elastic quality insofar as it is "adapted, changed, and redesigned as the study proceeds, because of the social realities of doing qualitative research among and with the living" (Janesick, 1994, p. 218).

Like all case histories, the process is essentially interpretive (Warren, 1978), requiring the integration of data "into an intelligible pattern of meaning" (Axtell, 1987, p. 460).[3] Inductive data analysis techniques were employed to increase the likelihood of uncovering the multiple realities of participants and of identifying the "mutually shaping influences" that interact in the process of policy change (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 40). As Janesick

[3]To say that the research process is interpretive and, thus, not truly "objective" is not to say, as critics of postmodernism and poststructuralism assert, that all standards of inquiry are being abandoned. As Scott (1989) argues in her review of historiography, "To maintain this [history as interpretive practice] does not signal the abandonment of all standards; acknowledging that history is an interpretive practice does not imply that 'anything goes.' Rather, it assumes that discursive communities (in this case, historians) share a commitment to accuracy and to procedures of verification and documentation" (p. 690).

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(1994) observes, "there is a continual reassessment and refining of concepts as the fieldwork proceeds" (p. 214). Thus, the research process involves "a series of iterations of theory formation, observation, and theory revision" (George and McKeown, 1985, p. 34; Majchrzak, 1984).

The research design utilized in the study is best conceptualized and understood as emergent rather than constructed preordinately (*a priori*) because, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue

> it is inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about the many multiple realities to devise the design adequately; because what emerges as a function of the interaction between inquirer and phenomenon is largely unpredictable in advance; because the inquirer cannot know sufficiently well the patterns of mutual shaping that are likely to exist; and because the various value systems involved (including the inquirer's own) interact in unpredictable ways to influence the outcome. (p. 41)

In this study, data collection and analysis took place concurrently. Interpretation and analysis were incorporated into all phases of the research design (Davidson and Lytle, 1982). This is necessary in case study research "because analytic activities, such as deciding whether and how to pursue various lines of evidence, must be dealt with during the fieldwork" (Yin, 1982, p. 91).

Description of Data Sources

The data sources utilized in the study include descriptive accounts in major newspapers and journals, official documents, and congressional testimony and transcripts. As Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier (1994) note, "hearings before legislative committees...represent a virtually inexhaustible source of information on the expressed beliefs of a wide range of subsystem actors" (p. 8). Since this is a case study of policy rhetoric, this testimony was of particular value.

Research Validity in Data Collection and Analysis

Multiple data sources were utilized in the study to prevent overreliance on any single data source. Multiple sources of data helps address the potential problem of construct validity (Yin, 1987). As for the process of document analysis, we must be aware, drawing from historiographic research methodologies, that there is no single proper method for analyzing documents (Davidson and Lytle, 1982). If there were, "the historical profession would be a good deal simpler, if not a great deal duller" (Davidson and Lytle, 1982, p. 66). Davidson and Lytle (1982) suggest that document analysis include the following techniques: (1) understand the surface content of the document, (2) establish context by asking what the document might have said but did not, (3) reconstruct the intellectual worlds behind the document's words to ensure common understanding of terminology across documents and among participants, and (4) interpret the document according to how it functions in a

specific social situation (within its context). All data were analyzed using these four criteria.

As to the validity and reliability of public testimony, Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier (1994) assert, "although public testimony has some validity problems, these are no greater--and often less significant--than in alternative techniques such as mail questionnaires, personal interviews, perusal of documents, and participant observation" (p. 8). Ultimately, the question of validity rests upon the degree of fit between the explanation and description of the object under study. In other words, as Janesick (1994) asks, "Is the explanation credible?" (p. 216). Ultimately, it is upon this basis that the validity of the study rests.

Limitations and Constraints of the Study

As Smith and Robbins (1982) observe, "at its best, policy research is a matter of tradeoffs and compromises" (p. 45). No single study, no matter how well constructed, can adequately capture the complexity of decisionmaking in the public realm. At most, it can offer insights into the forces and institutional processes shaping decisionmaking. However, no study or theory can do justice to the complexity of the process. With this in mind, there are several limitations to this study. First, the study is not cross-comparative. Thus, the ability to make generalizations from the study is limited or, as Smith and Robbins (1982) suggest, unknown. Also, as Steiner (1975) argues, any model of communication is also a model of trâns-lation (the vertical or horizontal transfer of significance). No two human beings "use words and syntax to

signify exactly the same things, to send identical signals of valuation and inference" (Steiner, 1975, p. 45).

The methodological problem of discerning the veracity of each political actor's statements is offset, in part, by the nature of the policymaking process. George and McKeown (1985) argue that

> the social nature of decision making implies that actors must communicate with one another in making decisions; that the content of this communication will reveal much about the attention focus, the decision rules, and the behavior of actors (even if it cannot be taken at face value). (p. 37)

The presence of multiple, socially constructed realities within the research paradigm required the researcher to use a variety of data sources to attain some "level of understanding (*verstehen*)" of the problem (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 37). The collection of data from a variety of sources increases the validity of the data and the interpretations drawn thereon (Huberman and Crandall, 1982; Smith and Robbins, 1982; Majchrzak, 1984).

As with all research, the study is limited by the influence of the values of the researcher in the selection of the problem, the theories used to guide the collection and analysis of data, and the presentation of the findings and conclusions of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Finally, despite attempts to compensate for the methodological shortcomings of the case study approach, "there are limits to what case studies can accomplish" (George and McKeown, 1985, p. 50). Since the research is

part of a larger, on-going research project on school choice, the findings of the paper are preliminary and subject to further analysis and interpretation.

Findings

In 1995, the state legislature authorized the creation of charter schools under Senate Bill 1 (SB 1). SB 1 is a limited form of school choice insofar as it permits both intra- and inter-district transfers of students within the public school system. It falls short of a full scale voucher plan because it permits choice only within the public school system and does not permit public money to be used for private schools. Voucher proposals were introduced in each of the last three legislative sessions but failed in each case to pass the legislature.

To understand why charter schools were authorized by the legislature and vouchers failed to pass, it is necessary first to understand the massive complexity and scope of SB 1. SB 1 involved a complete rewriting of the state education code.[4] It was the most comprehensive overhaul of the public education system in Texas since the 1940s. Senator Bill Ratliff (R), chair of the Senate Committee on Education, said of proposed revisions to the code

> There is certainly something in this bill to offend everyone. Any time you're going to try to totally rewrite something like the public education code, you have to step on a lot of toes or you're not ever going to get anything done. (Brooks, 1995a, p. B3)

[4]The state's sunset law required the 1995 Legislature to reauthorize the state education code (Brooks, 1994e). However, the respective legislative committees in the house and senate went through the entire education code line by line making revisions in an effort to simplify the code, return power to local school boards, and eliminate much of the jargon in the code. Such revisions were not mandated by the sunset law.

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SB 1 reversed a decade-long trend of state centralization and was intended to return more control to local communities (Clark, 1997). Thus, the debates surrounding charter schools and vouchers occurred amidst debates over hundreds of other provisions in the bill. The debate over choice must be viewed within the context of revisions to other areas such as curriculum, textbooks, discipline, teacher and administrator preparation, accountability, and school finance.

In Texas, the debate over school choice centers around three rhetorical policy domains[5]--freedom from bureaucracy, the virtues of the marketplace, and freedom of choice (individualism, liberty, and equal educational opportunity)--the parameters of which were established by those advocating charter school and voucher plans. First, the bureaucratic inefficiency of public schools and of government (as a public entity) was lambasted, generating calls for reform. The debate was framed within the context of freeing schools from red tape. In an editorial in support of charter schools, Joe Christie, former state senator and co-founder of the Austin Children's Education Opportunity Foundation, argued that public schools need to be

> free from the 13 pounds of rules and regulations that restrict a teacher's ability to respond to each child's individual needs. Free from the bloated school bureaucracy that, according to the Texas Research

[5]Policy domains are general areas of policy such as education, welfare, or crime. A *rhetorical* policy domain places emphasis on the selection, development, and presentation of policy arguments within those domains.

League, siphons off 42 cents of every dollar spent on public education in Texas. (Christie, 1994, p. A11)

Republican state representative Kent Grusendorf, member of the House Committee on Public Education, criticized the current system as "overburdened with rules and regulations" (Grusendorf, 1994, p. A13). School choice, he asserts, "will set good teachers free to teach, and curb the worst excesses of school bureaucrats. More educational dollars will find their way to the classroom" (p. A13).

Then-governor Ann Richards, a Democrat engaged in a tough reelection campaign against Republican challenger George Bush, Jr., also adopted the rhetoric of freedom, stating in a speech, "We have to free up our schools and create an atmosphere where the local schools feel free to do whatever is necessary to help their students succeed" (Brooks, 1994a, p. A1).[6] Echoing Richards, state representative Ron Wilson (D), an African-American legislator from Houston, argued that "the public education problem has reached critical mass. What we have doesn't work" (Brooks, 1994a, p. A17). Jimmy Mansour, representing an organization called Putting Children First,[7] argued that "over 500,000 Texas schoolchildren today are required to attend failing schools--that is just wrong" (Brooks, 1997b, p. B1). John Pirvett, president of Performing Schools Corporation based in Houston[8], stated "the

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[6]During the campaign, both Richards and Bush called for a return to local control of education and a reversal of the trend toward state centralization (Brooks, 1994d).
[7]Putting Children First is a coalition of two hundred business executives and civic groups led by Mansour and former state senator Joe Christie.
[8]Performing Schools Corp. is "one of several [companies] that has sprung up nationwide to assist schools or districts that want to set up charter schools" (Brooks, 1994a, p. A17).

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underlying belief of charter schools is that every school has unique needs" (Brooks, 1994a, p. A17). In an editorial, Rep. Kent Grusendorf (R) asserted that "Texas parents are the best qualified to determine which school best fits their own child's individual needs. Where more school choices are available, parents will determine which school best meets their own child's educational needs" (Grusendorf, 1994, p. A13).

Pirvett and Grusendorf's comments add a rhetorical twist to conventional arguments against bureaucracy by adding the dimension of diversity, thereby expanding the scope of criticism to include support for diverse schools for a diverse student population. Such pleas have much appeal in a state with the fourth highest percentage of minority students in the nation (Education Week, 1997). Coupled with the evocative statements of Christie (13 pounds of presumably burdensome regulations and the siphoning of 42 cents of every dollar [again presumed waste]), the language employed structured the flow of the debate, thereby influencing the outcome.

Interestingly, little was said by politicians about what was good about public schools in Texas. The "dialogue" was decidedly one-sided, so one-sided in fact that both Republicans and Democrats seemed to agree on the need for reform. This is particularly striking given evidence that performance on state exams had been steadily improving ("Steady As She Goes," 1997). By structuring debate in such a fashion, the question became not whether public education should be reformed, but rather how. It is at this juncture that

the rhetoric moved into the second area of debate--that of freedom in the marketplace.

Proponents argued that school choice would improve education through the principles of the free-market (House Research Organization [HRO], 1994). Wilson, representing an urban district where "nearly 87 percent of high school seniors failed a statewide achievement exam" introduced a bill during the 1993 legislative session which would have created a "voucher program for disadvantaged students. Under the pilot, parents could use public tax dollars to pay tuition at a free public or private school" (Brooks, 1994a, p. A17). Wilson supports charter schools as well, arguing that they introduce "badly needed competition and innovation for [sic] public schools" (Brooks, 1994a, p. A17). His position mirrored that of Governor Bush who stated "competition is something we shouldn't be afraid of...charter schools inject competition into the public education system" (Brooks, 1996c, p. B3). Several newspaper editorials touted the virtues of charter schools as a way to "provide parents with options within the public school system and create a form of competition that can elevate academic performance" ("Vouchers," 1997, p. A14).

Somewhat surprisingly, there was little organized opposition to the creation of charter schools in Texas. Governors Richards and Bush, Lieutenant Governor Bullock, other top legislative leaders, and numerous interest groups, including the Texas Parents & Teachers Association (PTA) and the Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA), supported various charter

school proposals (Brooks, 1994b; 1994c).[9] The debate centered not upon whether charter schools should be created, but rather how many of such schools should be authorized by the legislature. SB 1 authorized the creation of up to twenty charter schools (Fikac, 1996b). Governor Bush has consistently pushed the state legislature to allow for the creation of more charter schools--to take the cap off the number of charter schools allowed (Brooks, 1996c; Fikac, 1996b).

However, supporters of public schools, including various teacher groups, urged caution and said expansion of charter schools should be delayed until their performance could be adequately evaluated and compared with public schools (Brooks, 1996b). John Cole, president of the Texas Federation of Teachers, stated, "They [charter schools] haven't taught one kid yet, so we don't know if this is a successful endeavor or not. We must always bear in mind that we are experimenting with other people's children" (Brooks, 1996b, pp. A1, A12). Doug Rogers, executive director of the Association of Texas Professional Educators, stated "we would not like for him to expand the charter school program until we've had time to see how they have performed" (Brooks, 1996c, p. B3). These views are consistent with research on charter schools. Garcia and Garcia (1996) argue that charter schools rest largely on implicit and unstudied assumptions. The researchers note that millions of dollars are being invested in such schools, the number of charter schools is

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[9]TSTA is the state's largest teacher group, with some 95,000 members (Brooks, 1994d).

steadily increasing, and there is no evidence that this innovation will actually improve public schools.

Much of the debate on charter schools centered on how many should be authorized by the legislature and not whether any should be created at all. The dialogue of the "debate" assumes charter schools as given. The scope of conflict in this case was very narrow, thereby limiting the dialogue and structuring the debate within narrow parameters. Testimony by numerous witnesses reveals little disagreement on the creation of charter schools. Opposition arose only when debate turned to the application of market principles to voucher plans.

Sen. Gonzalo Barrientos (D), a voucher opponent, was less convinced of the virtues of applying free-market principles to public schools. He stated "I'm sure there would be good people and good schools. But there also would be some fly-by-nighters who will take the money and run" (Brooks, 1995e, p. A15). Voucher critic Brad Duggan, executive director of the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association, stated that "It's real clear what happens when you give someone a check and tell them go out in the marketplace and shop for services. Parents and students get taken advantage of" (Brooks, 1995e, p. A15). Paul Sadler (D), chair of the House Committee on Public Education during the 1995 legislative session, stated that "we seem to be sending a message to the public...that we are going to let them take their money and run. I'm not willing to send that message" (Brooks, 1995c, p. B3).

In an editorial, it was argued that "not every child can take advantage of vouchers or transfers within public schools because there are only so many schools and so many desks" ("Vouchers," 1997, p. A14).

Several groups questioned the allegéd improvement voucher plans would bring to public schools. Citing a study conducted by TSTA of choice programs in twenty states, Richard Kouri, the organization's president, stated "there is not one single school district in all these twenty states where student achievement has risen as a result of 'choice' alone" (Brooks, 1994c, p. B1). Carolyn Boyle, spokesperson for the Coalition for Public Schools, which helped defeat a voucher bill in 1995, argued that "Texas can't afford a $1 billion private school voucher experiment that would drain money from underfunded public schools" (Brooks, 1997b, p. B1). Sen. Barrientos argued that "vouchers will not improve teaching methods; vouchers will not repair outdated buildings; vouchers will not make parents more attentive or involved in their children's schoolwork. Vouchers will undermine all these things by taking money out of the system" (Brooks, 1997c, p. B1). Unlike the debate on the effectiveness of charter schools, in which most groups were silent, the scope of the debate over the efficiency of voucher plans was expanded to include the vocal opposition of several groups. This was a significant factor to the failure of voucher proposals in the legislature.

Debate in the third domain centered on freedom of choice. Debate in this domain involved evocation of the values of individualism, liberty, and equal educational opportunity. Interestingly, equal educational opportunity

was invoked both by supporters of school choice and by opponents. It is within the domain of freedom of choice that the scope of the conflict most expanded, particularly with respect to vouchers.

Much of the charter schools debate supporting freedom of choice followed well-established and predictable patterns. Former Governor Richards, herself a former schoolteacher, stated "parents should have the right to select the public school that is best for their child. If the right school doesn't exist, they should be able to create one" (Brooks, 1994d, p. B7). Many African-American parents in Texas are pushing for open-enrollment charter schools,[10] according to Reverend Frank Garrett, Jr., chair of the Coalition for Quality Education--a group that supports quality education initiatives for African-Americans (Berls, 1996). Sen. Ratliff stated "I feel very strongly that people ought to be able to control their own destinies. I am very pleased at the nature of the charters that we've had" (Berls, 1996, p. B5).

Unlike previous discourse which focused on bureaucratic inefficiency and the market, discourse on choice in charter schools raised questions of inclusion and exclusion. In an editorial, Dave McNeeley (1995) asked, "Are home-rule schools racist?" (p. A11).[11] This charge was made by several

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[10]SB 1 authorizes the State Board of Education (SBOE) to grant open-enrollment charters to schools operated by a public, private, or independent institution of higher education, a non-profit organization, or a governmental entity. These schools are considered part of the public school system and are subject to the same regulations as home-rule charter schools (see footnote 11 below).

[11]A home-rule school district is a form of charter school designed to give parents and teachers more input into the delivery of education. Such districts are exempt from many state mandates. However, such districts are not exempt from regulations regarding class size, graduation and accountability requirements, laws related to bilingual and special education, textbooks, finance, and selected additional provisions (SB 1).

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minority members of the House in debate over revisions to the education code (McNeeley, 1995). McNeeley notes that it is reasonable to suspect the motives of those who seek to leave the public education system. He asserts that

> After several decades of white flight, where white parents pulled their kids out of urban schools and headed for the suburbs, leaving the predominately minority and poor school kids to fend for themselves, the formation of home-rule schools certainly deserves a hard look. (p. A11)

McNeeley (1995) concludes by noting that "some might think this [home-rule charters] a guise for racism, for skimming the cream of good students from the public schools. But that's no less so than moving to the suburbs seems to be at present" (p. A11). Regarding home-rule districts, Rep. Christine Hernandez (D) "fears the traditionally low turnout among minority voters will leave them out of the discussions of school issues" such as local elections to create home-rule districts (Brooks, 1995h, p. B3).

Rejecting allegations that SB 1 was racist and would primarily benefit the Anglo middle class, Governor Bush stated, "This bill...is aimed to lift everybody up. It is aimed to be good for all Texans regardless of where they live or where [sic] born" ("To School," 1995, p. 28). In response to criticisms that charter schools were elitist, State Education Commissioner Mike Moses noted that "the ethnic diversity found among the charter schools' student body defies some early predictions and shows that this innovative approach to

education is being used to educate a wide range of Texans" (Fikac, 1996b, p. B10). In a comprehensive survey of charter schools nationwide, as part of a four-year research effort to analyze the charter school movement, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE, 1997) found that charter schools nationwide "serve the great racial and economic diversity of students that make up public education" with a racial composition roughly similar to statewide averages (p. 1). However, open enrollment programs in Minnesota, Massachusetts, Arkansas, and Arizona serve a disproportionate number of affluent Anglo students (Bastian, 1995).

Although the dialogue on choice in charter schools was broadened to a greater degree than in the other rhetorical domains examined earlier, nowhere was the dialogue expanded more than with respect to choice within a proposed voucher system. Speaking in support of vouchers, Rep. Wilson stated "we're talking about the people who fund the system having the option to take some of their tax dollars and apply them to their child's education at a private institution" (Brooks, 1997a, p. B1).

In Texas, choice vis-a-vis vouchers was framed within the often-conflicting rhetoric of individualism, liberty, and equal educational opportunity. Interestingly, proponents often combined all three in an attempt to control the dialogue. Choice was advocated as a method to "equalize educational opportunity by giving all families the options now enjoyed only by those wealthy enough to send their children to private schools or move to areas with high-quality public schools" (HRO, 1994, p. 1). Wilson stated that

"minority parents feel trapped. Until we fix what's wrong with the schools, they need to have options" (Brooks, 1994c, p. B2). He stated, "I live in the middle of the black community in Houston...I see those kids having to negotiate death and destruction and drugs every day to get to school. They've got no way out" (Brooks, 1995f, p. B2). Wilson asserted that "parents are looking for a tool to give their children a fighting chance" (Brooks, 1996a, p. B6).

In an editorial, Rep. Kent Grusendorf (R), a member of the House Education Committee who introduced a school choice plan for low-income students during the 1993 legislative session, argued that

> It makes absolutely no sense to mandate that a child should attend a certain school just because some elitist drew a line on the ground and said if you live on this side of the line, this is your only choice. (p. A13)

Sen. Jane Nelson (R), like Wilson and Grusendorf a supporter of a pilot voucher program for disadvantaged students, argued that "the bottom line is the (voucher) recipients would be children of low-income families...in inner-city school districts, who have no other way out of the system" (Brooks, 1995i, p. B6). Rep. Paul Sadler (D), chair of the House Public Education Committee, stated that "the intent of the legislation was to give parents as much flexibility as possible in where their children will be educated, particularly in school districts with a history of low performance" (Brooks, 1995k, p. B6).

Geraldine Green, an African-American parent who sends her son to a private school, supports efforts to establish vouchers. She stated

> What we're saying is that our tax dollars can go toward private education, and it should be the parent's choice...Too many of our black male children are falling through the cracks. Why not let us use our tax money to give them a better chance?" (Brooks, 1996a, pp. B1, B6)

Green asserted "I don't think they [minority legislators] understand how important this is to parents. Either they're not listening or they're not concerned" (Brooks, 1996a, p. B6).

Another African-American parent who also sends her son to a private school stated

> It's a really big (financial) struggle, but I refuse not to provide the education he needs and deserves. Many parents are like myself and can't afford private schools. We should be able to take our kids wherever they will be educated. (Brooks, 1996a, p. B6)

During one of numerous debates on vouchers, Grusendorf (1994) concluded that "defenders of the status quo can run out their red herrings kicking and screaming all the way, but school choice is inevitable. It is just a matter of time" (p. A13). In an address to the Texas Parents & Teachers Association, Sandra Zelno, Pennsylvania PTA president agreed, stating that "some sort of choice is inevitable" (Brooks, 1994b, p. B2). But, asked Zelno, "what type of caste system would we create by choosing a voucher system

that allows public dollars to be spent on private schools?" (Brooks, 1994b, p. B2).

Members of TSTA expressed concern that choice programs could further widen the gap between rich and poor (Brooks, 1994c). TSTA President Richard Kouri sharply criticized voucher plans, calling them the "agenda of the extreme right and other ultra-conservative groups" (Brooks, 1994c, p. B2). Wilson retorted that "I can hardly be classified as part of the extreme right. Educators still have their heads stuck in the sand" (Brooks, 1994c, p. B2). Magnolia McCullough of the African Methodist Episcopal Church for the 10th Episcopal District expressed the fear that initiatives for school choice could lead to further segregation of schools. She stated that "it could be viewed as re-segregation. Good teachers are going to follow the money and the best students" ("Education Hearing," 1995, p. B3). Because anyone or any organization could create schools, Brad Duggan, executive director of the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association questions "whether religious zealots or political extremists could set up schools with state funds" (Brooks, 1995e, p. A15).

Duggan went so far as to criticize the motives of voucher proponents. He asserted that "the whole voucher program has been sold as [the] way for low-income parents to obtain the same quality of education as the governor's children. But we know private schools aren't going to open their doors to all students" (Brooks, 1995e, p. A15). Rep. Turner (D) stated that "when people want something, they don't mind using minorities and the poor to open up the

door for programs they want. If you want it, use your own kids to justify it" (Brooks, 1995f, p. B2). Turner asserted "if you are poor, if you are a child, if you have been abandoned--(then) nobody speaks for you and you are left out of the process" (Brooks, 1995g, p. B3).

Voucher plans were criticized by lawmakers as returning segregation to public schools--making them separate and unequal (Brooks, 1995g). A. P. Brooks, education reporter for a major newspaper in the state, observed that "the discourse in the Legislature [on vouchers] is divided largely along racial and ethnic lines" (Brooks, 1995h, p. B3). Most minority lawmakers oppose voucher plans amid fears of widening the division between the haves and have-nots (Brooks, 1995h). Expressing concern over vouchers, Sen. Gregory Luna (D) said "I hope we're not extracting from the system the problemless (students) and leaving behind the others...who need our help the most" (Brooks, 1995j, p. B3). Rep. Turner agreed and argued that

> In the foreseeable future, the overwhelming majority of African-American and Hispanic children will be educated in the public school system. Every dollar sent to the voucher system and private schools is a dollar less from the public school system. If we work to destroy that base, we will be condemning those children to an inferior education. (Brooks, 1996a, p. B6)

Gil Gamez, director of the League of United Latin American Citizens, said "Hispanics are waking up to the fact that so-called reform proposals are only disguised efforts to shut out minorities from educational and economic

advancement" (Brooks, 1997d, p. B3). Some participants in the dialogue expressed fears of a pilot program for vouchers. Phil Strickland of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission stated that "some of the legislation...may indeed just be a baby in terms of the impact on public education. But it's a baby that's going to grow into a 500-pound gorilla" (Brooks, 1997e, p. B8). Sen. Royce West (D), an African-American, argued that "this [voucher bill] will create flight from the inner city. It is very clear to me...that if you have a low-performing school and you give that school the necessary resources, you will see improvement in student performance" (Brooks, 1997e, p. B8).

Some fear vouchers "could work against social mobility for all children because money would be drained from many districts" ("Vouchers," 1997, p. A14). Voucher proponents ignore or "sidestep the larger social consequences of such a system" ("Oppose school," 1996, p. A8). "Even with a voucher system, the poorest, least informed parents likely will keep their children in a financially strapped and educationally feeble public school system" ("Oppose school," 1996, p. A8).

> Why subsidize a policy, under the guise of improvement through competition, that could end up subsidizing middle-class flight from the public school system and reduce the role of education in attempting to establish a level playing field for all Texans? ("Oppose school," 1996, p. A8)

During the 1997 legislative session, private school voucher plans, on which the far right spent more than $1 million on legislative campaigns and a

huge lobby effort, never made it out of either the House or Senate (Richards, 1997). According to Richards,

> Despite their effort to portray the voucher campaign as a way to help poor kids, the money and history associated with the voucher supporters made that hard to believe. Many of the same folks supporting vouchers had fought against earlier education initiatives for low-income children including decreasing class sizes, increasing early childhood education and equalizing school funding. (p. A13)

Richards' comments raise the question of the breadth of support for vouchers in Texas. Toch (1997) notes that support for voucher programs is spreading and includes such non-conservative groups as the Urban Institute and the Annie C. Casey Foundation. Wells (1993) noted that public support for vouchers has increased steadily since the early 1980s. The Texas Poll, a survey of 998 adult Texans' views on education conducted by the University of Texas, found that nearly two-thirds (62%) of respondents favored a voucher system for use in public and private schools (Brooks, 1997a).

Rep. Wilson, who introduced a bill during the 1993 legislative session to create a pilot voucher program for disadvantaged students, stated "there is tremendous support for some sort of voucher program, especially among minorities" in Texas (Brooks, 1994c, p. B2). However, TSTA President Richard Kouri disputed this statement, asserting "we found there is no groundswell of public demand for choice options, either nationally or statewide" (Brooks, 1994c, p. B2). Representing a district with a large

Hispanic population, Rep. Christine Hernandez (D) stated "I don't see or hear about vouchers when I go out into my community" (Brooks, 1996a, p. B6). Her comments reflect a lack of support for vouchers in the Hispanic community. With the notable exception of Rep. Wilson, none of the minority lawmakers in the legislature support voucher plans. This is particularly significant in a state with more Hispanic elected officials than any other state. Nearly twenty percent of the legislature is Hispanic, nearly ten percent African-American.

In the absence of strong grass-roots support for vouchers, particularly among Hispanics, and in the presence of committed, vocal opposition by a coalition composed of the state's major teacher groups, professional administrator associations, the Texas PTA, the Coalition for Public Schools, and the Texas Hispanic Families Coalition[12], voucher plans introduced in each of the last three legislative sessions failed.

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[12]The Texas Hispanic Families Coalition is composed of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), business, veterans and civil rights groups, including the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and the Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (Brooks, 1997d). This coalition supports charter schools but is opposed to vouchers.

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Discussion

> Edelman (1988) argues that
>
> the critical element in political maneuver for advantage is the creation of meaning: the construction of beliefs about events, policies, leaders, problems, and crises that rationalize or challenge existing inequalities. The strategic need is to immobilize opposition and mobilize support...the key tactic must always be the evocation of interpretations that legitimize favored courses of action and threaten or reassure people so as to encourage them to be supportive or to remain quiescent. (pp. 103-104)

The battle over school choice--over vouchers and charter schools--in Texas may be viewed as a series of political maneuvers over the creation of meaning. To achieve success, language had to be manipulated in an optimal fashion, with optimal being defined in relation to the cultural context of the political arena.

For example, Bastian (1995) notes that opposing school choice "is a bit like being asked to burn the American flag at a VFW meeting. You have every right to do it, but do you want to? After all, choice is a bedrock American value" (p. 205). This is particularly true within the political culture of policy elites in Texas. Haag, Peebles, and Keith (1997) assert that individualism is the single most important political value in Texas. In Texas, the values of individualism and liberty are cherished above all others. McNeil (1988) noted "the entrepreneurial presumption is that you take care of yourself

and your own; if you are not successful right now, either your luck may turn any day, or you're not working hard enough" (p. 203). Individualism is so pervasive that it is institutionalized in the operation of the state legislature, the executive leadership, and incorporated into symbolic markers such as the state flag.

Lather (1996) argues that this transparent use of language is not innocent. "Clear speech is part of a discursive system, a network of power that has material effects" (Lather, 1996, p. 528). By utilizing language to structure dialogue, it becomes possible to "construct a world in which class, race, sex, and other inequalities are not paramount" (Edelman, 1988, p. 114). This is exactly what occurred in the debate over charter schools. Language was manipulated in such a manner that issues of class, race, gender, or social inequities were structured out of the policy dialogue. According to Bartolome and Macedo (1997)

> The illusion of choice...creates a pedagogy of entrapment that makes it undemocratic to argue against school choice. Thus school choice becomes part of a discourse that brooks no dissension or argument, for to argue against it is to deny democracy. (p. 233)

This is consistent with Fine's (1990) argument that the language of choice often serves as a justification for segregation by race and class.

In Texas, choice is viewed within the cultural referents of individualism and liberty. To argue against choice, opponents are placed in the unenviable position of opposing a cultural value widely held among policy

elites. As Bosso (1994) suggested, policy change is difficult when it conflicts with strongly held public values in the political culture. To argue against choice is, therefore, un-American or worse, un-Texan. Hence the optimism in Representative Grusendorf's statement that school choice is inevitable in Texas. Even Senator Barrientos, a voucher opponent and charter school skeptic, admitted as much in a committee hearing. The ability of choice proponents to frame the issues within the context of deeply-held cultural values--individualism and liberty--greatly increased the chances for legislative success.

Charter schools legislation won approval during the 1995 legislative session. In 1997, the legislature expanded the number of charters that could be granted. In the 1993, 1995, and 1997 legislative sessions, voucher proposals failed. Given the preceding analysis, why did charter schools succeed while vouchers failed if both efforts reflect a cultural value important to most Texans?

A major reason for the success of charter schools legislation was that the rhetorical scope of the conflict was narrow. There was little debate as to whether charters should be granted to public schools. The language employed in debates over charter schools reveals that the outcome was taken as given. Questions were only raised concerning the number to which they should be expanded. There was little significant dialogue on the issue of charter schools and thus little opportunity to expand the discourse. This finding lends support to research emphasizing the critical role of language in structuring

decisionmaking and shaping the scope of conflict (Riker, 1986; Schattschneider, 1960). Utilizing the language of choice within the public sphere to structure dialogue, supporters of charter schools were able to limit the scope of the conflict. Once successful, charter schools were quickly adopted.

The scope of the conflict over vouchers, however, was much larger, and thus less easily controlled or dominated by any single group. Multiple voices were heard and opinions expressed. Although voucher proponents attempted to manipulate language to limit the scope of the debate, opponents were able to expand the dialogue to include the issue of the transference of money to the private sphere. The Texas State Teachers Association threatened to challenge any voucher plan in the courts. Richard Kouri, president of the organization, stated that "it's a lawsuit that will make school finance look small", a potentially powerful threat given the decades-long legal battle over school finance (Brooks, 1995b, p. A6).

Many opponents viewed voucher programs targeted at students of color "as an opening gambit in an effort to institute vouchers for everyone" (Lowe, 1995, p. 203). They were particularly skeptical when, in the wake of repeated defeats, voucher proposals were repackaged to target low-income youth (Dougherty and Sostre, 1992). Often, the seemingly neutral language of choice is used as part of "thinly veiled strategies [sic] to facilitate racial prejudice and white flight" (Fine, 1990, p. 112). The suspicions of policymakers such as Duggan, Rep. Turner, and Sen. Barrientos of the

motives of many choice proponents are supported by several studies which conclude, as Fine (1990) did, that "the rhetoric of choice typically enters educational discourse when a privileged group seeks refuge from one public context and entrance into another, more elite context" (p. 114).

Since the scope of the rhetoric was more broad, encompassing issues such as inclusion/exclusion and conflict between the public and private spheres, the scope of the conflict was correspondingly larger. This significantly weakened the prospects of legislative passage of voucher legislation, particularly when coupled with strident, organized opposition. Unlike the coalition of neoliberal and neoconservative reformers who pushed through parental choice in Milwaukee (Carl, 1996), there was no broad-based political coalition to push vouchers in Texas. With the notable exception of Rep. Wilson, the voucher movement ran into a solid wall of opposition among minority legislators in the state legislature. None of the Hispanic legislators supported voucher proposals, in fact many actively opposed them, and their support was essential for passage of the legislation.[13] Issues of class, ethnicity, and inequality which were largely excluded from the dialogue on charter schools could not be excluded from the dialogue on school vouchers. By using language to structure dialogue, participants were able to control the scope of the conflict, thereby determining the outcome.

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[13]Hispanic legislators and nearly all African-American legislators were largely silent or quiescent on the issue of charter schools. The lack of organized-opposition facilitated the passage of this legislation.

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Conclusion

The major political advantage of charter schools is that they occupy something of a middle ground between the public education system as it is currently structured on the one hand and a voucher system on the other (Sauter, 1993). Some researchers describe charter schools as "experiments financed with within the public school system" (Bauman, 1996, p. 122). Since they do not go beyond the rhetoric of the public sphere, the scope of the conflict over charter schools is accordingly limited.[14] As such, charter schools were politically more palatable to a legislature committed to educational reform. The language employed by policymakers narrowed the scope of conflict over charter schools, thus facilitating their passage. However, the dialogue over vouchers was expanded, thereby expanding the scope of the conflict and providing a forum through which issues of race and class, of inclusion and exclusion, could be considered within the policy dialogue. The resulting political firestorm doomed the prospects of passing voucher legislation.

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[14]Bella Rosenberg of the American Federation of Teachers argues that some charter schools clearly represent "efforts at establishing a private school in a public system" (Clark, 1996, p. 656). I agree and would argue that the distinction made between the public and private spheres is largely rhetorical and socially constructed. As such, the distinction between charter schools and voucher plans is far less than the rhetoric of policy debates would suggest. Taebel and Brenner (1994) note, for example, that "school choice has been used in many forms [in Texas] ranging from alternative education programs, magnet programs, inter- and intradistrict transfers, tax credits and vouchers which can be applied toward tuition and other educational services" (p. 99).

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